

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – JANUARY 23, 2020

Youth justice targets to reduce number of young people in detention vital in light of new spending data: Jesuit Social Services

The Victorian Government must set public targets to reduce the number of young people in detention, on remand and who re-offend after exiting the youth justice system, in light of a new report that shows an almost doubling of spending on youth detention services over the last four years, says Jesuit Social Services.

The annual Report on Government Services report shows that Victorian Government spending on youth detention services increased by 98 per cent, to a total of \$121.9 million, between 2014/15 and 2018/19.

“This report highlights that we are spending more money in the wrong places – spending more money to incarcerate more young people when the overarching purpose of any effective youth justice system should be keeping young people out of detention in the first place,” says Jesuit Social Services Acting CEO Sally Parnell.

“While we welcome a 47 per cent increase in spending on community-based services for young people who have contact with the youth justice system over the same timeframe, this money is simply disproportionate compared to the substantial increase in funding on detention services.

“This is despite the overwhelming evidence that shows us that detention should only ever be used as a last resort, and that the best way of preventing and reducing crime is by holding young people accountable for their actions while supporting them address their offending behaviour, to connect with school and family, and to lead healthy and productive lives in the community.”

Today’s report also shows that the average daily number of children and young people aged 10 to 17 in detention in Victoria increased by 36 per cent between 2014/15 and 2018/19 (to an average of 112 per day), despite the most recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showing that the number of young people committing offences in Victoria has dropped for five consecutive years.

Jesuit Social Services’ recent submission to the [2020/21 Victorian State Budget](#) highlights that the setting and achieving of public targets to reduce youth offending, recidivism, incarceration and the number of young people on remand, as well as corresponding targets specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, would support more young people in the community and allow for further investment in diversionary and rehabilitative options for young people in trouble.

The submission also urges the Victorian Government to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years, to fund programs that take a therapeutic approach to anti-social behaviour and to expand and promote restorative justice approaches such as Youth Justice Group Conferencing.

“Increased spending on detention takes us further away from our goal of a youth justice system based on the evidence of what works in rehabilitating and re-socialising children and young people – crucial to this is supporting them in the community to turn their lives around and lead positive lives.”

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